

Thoma Ionescu, the prominent surgeon, about “our universities”

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Abstract.

Prof. Thoma Ionescu (1860-1926) laid the foundations of modern European Romanian surgery. He was an excellent anatomist and a skilled and innovative surgeon. Concurrently he was a patriot and a citizen deeply involved in forging his country's destiny of progress and prosperity. On March 22nd 1914, in the Romanian Parliament, Thoma Ionescu, senator and rector of the Bucharest University, made an interpellation as a representative of this academic forum, addressed to I.G. Duca, minister of Public Instruction and Cults. He revealed the difficulties which confronted “Our Universities”, as his discourse, later published at the State Printing House, was entitled. Prof. Ionescu's vivid interest in the crisis of the Romanian universities in 1914 pointed out some issues amazingly and unfortunately valid until today. Defining the University institution, Th. Ionescu outlined the roles it was supposed to play at that very moment: to consolidate the modern Romanian state, particularly under the circumstances engendered by the Second Balkan War (1912-1913); to form intellectual and professional elites; to develop applied science and scientific research; to create a unitary national consciousness, cultivating among intellectuals the feeling of sharing the same ethnic and cultural identity, together with similar ideals. However, the proper fulfilment of these purposes was limited by: the lack of autonomy and imposed political appointments in Universities; reduced funds, illustrated by precarious buildings and endowments; small salaries and, consequently, lack of qualified personnel, hardly yielding the future teachers; but also by the impossibility of financially supporting the deserving students, paupers most of them. Thoma Ionescu outlined the exceptional results of many Romanian graduates and their appreciation by great European university canters, often mentioned as reference standards. Th. Ionescu, the perfect patriot having also studied law in Paris, pleaded convincingly for the correction of this “university fiction”. Fifty years after the foundation of the University of Bucharest in 1864, he had to insist once again on the necessity for a mature Romanian high-school. I.G. Duca answered emphasizing the difficulties all interdependent educational branches encountered by then. Or, it was obvious that not only university studies were important, but pre-academic instruction constituted the root and trunk ensuring the academic crown splendour of the tree of knowledge, whereas the situation of schooling stages still left much to be desired in Romania.

Keywords: Thoma Ionescu, University, Bucharest, academic education



Biographical and professional landmarks. Thoma Ionescu (1860-1926) is considered the founder of the Romanian modern school of surgery, experimental surgery and topographic anatomy (Fig.1).

Fig.1 Thoma Ionescu

Also known as Thomas Jonnesco, Thoma Ionescu or Toma Ionnesco, he was

born not far from Bucharest, at Ploiesti (Romania) 161 years ago, on September 13th, 1860. After having attended the primary

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school in his hometown, and graduated from the “St. Sava” College in Bucharest, he studied at the University of Paris both medicine and law (1878-1885). After finishing his law studies in 1882, he dedicated himself entirely to medicine. He was an extern of the Paris Hospitals, then a temporary intern in 1885, and a permanent one in 1886. In 1887, along with Jean-Joseph Peyrot, “chirurgien des Hôpitaux”, Jonesco, “interne des Hôpitaux”, published his first paper dealing with the tubercular panaritium of the digitus medius (J-J Peyrot, Jonesco, *Observation et réflexions sur un cas de panaris tuberculeux du médius*, in Aristide Verneuil (directeur), *Études expérimentales et cliniques sur la tuberculose*, Paris: G. Masson, 1887, vol.1: 307-316. This study had been previously presented at the French Congress of Surgery in Paris, in the meeting held on October 28th, 1886.(1) The same year, 1887, being classified the first among fifteen candidates, Ionescu was appointed prosector and became the second foreign physician accepted in this position (2, 3). In this capacity he was the delegate of the French Ministry of Public Instruction to study and report on the anatomical education in universities in Germany and Austria (3).

In 1889 Ionescu edited his research concerning the “Topographical anatomy of the duodenum and the duodenal hernias” (*Anatomie topographique du duodénum et hernies duodénales*, Paris: Progrès Médical, Lecrosnier et Babé, 1889). In 1890, when in the fourth year of resident medical studentship (internship), he received the silver medal for his study entitled *Internal Retroperitoneal Hernias (Hernies internes rétro-péritonéales*, Paris: G. Steinheil, 1890), and obtained the Laborie Prize of the Academy of Medicine in Paris with the motivation that “it is a book that enabled the greatest progress in surgery during the current year” (“c’est un ouvrage ayant fait

progresser le plus la chirurgie durant l’année courante”). It was only in 1892 that Jonnesco defended his doctoral thesis in medicine, focused on the “Intrauterine evolution of the pelvic colon” (*L’évolution intrautérine du côlon pelvien*), a consistent paper he wrote guided by Professor Louis Hubert Farabeuf and his successor, Associate Professor Paul-Julien Poirier, most reputed French anatomists and surgeons, both of them. (1,2)

The visionary anatomist. Between 1892 and 1895, after having won the competition held in May 1892, Jonnesco delivered lectures of anatomy at the Paris Faculty of Medicine as a Deputy Professor of the Chair of Anatomy. He collaborated with Professors Paul Poirier (Paris), Adrien Charpy (Toulouse), Marie Adolphe Nicolas (Nancy) and Louis Auguste Prenant (Nancy) on the IVth volume of the well-known *Treatise of Human Anatomy - Traité d’anatomie humaine*, whose first edition appeared in 1894 (Paris: L. Bataille et Cie), where Thomas Jonnesco authored the chapter on the “Anatomy of the digestive tract” (*L’Anatomie du tube digestif*) (400 pages).(Fig.2) It was there that he was the first to have ever described the *pharyngeal aponevroses* (several structures formally bear his name: the *peripharyngeal fascia*, the *stylo-pharyngeal aponeurosis* or the *pharyngeal wing*, the *pterygopharyngeal lodge*, the *retro-stylian* or *stylopharyngeal lodge*), the ***duodeno-jejunal fossae*** along with the ***sigmoid fossae***, the “***pelvic colon***”, the ***rectal sheath*** and the ***rectal wings***, as well as the ***internal retroperitoneal hernias***. A fierce struggle for priority followed, opposing Thoma Ionescu and the German Professor Heinrich Wilhelm Gottfried von Waldeyer-Hartz (1836-1921) from 1900 to 1920: it concerned the discovery of the rectal sheath, Ionescu named the ***fibro-serous sheath of the rectum*** (1893),

whereas Waldeyer, already a renowned anatomist but who identified this element later, called it *fascia propria recti* (1899). (4)

The discovery and detailed description of all these anatomical structures largely improved surgical techniques in various pathologies of the rectum.



Fig.2.a. *Treatise of Human Anatomy, Tome IV, Paris, 1894. Title page*



Fig.2.b. *Detail. T. Jonnesco. Prosecteur de la Faculté de Paris is mentioned as coauthor of the IVth volume*

Back home. Although Ionescu received French citizenship in 1883, he returned to Romania in 1895. In fact, in 1894, the Institute of Topographical Anatomy and Operative Surgery was established for him at the Faculty of Medicine of Bucharest and he was asked to be the director of it, an invitation he

accepted without hesitation. Immediately after, Ionescu organized this Institute and created within it the departments of experimental surgery, pathological anatomy, comparative anatomy along with a museum and a library. Concurrently he became head of the “Coltzea” Hospital Surgical Clinic.

The skilled surgeon and inventive anesthetist. Dr. Jonnesco proved not only to be an excellent teacher of anatomy and prosector, but he revealed himself as a creative surgeon, as well. He had gained his undeniable skills between 1886-1890 working in the Capital of France with some of the most prominent professors of the time, such as Édouard Nicaise at the Laënnec Hospital, Paul-Jules Tillaux at the Beaujon Hospital, Jean-Joseph Peyrot at the Bicêtre Hospital, Paul Berger at the Tenon Hospital, Jean François Le Dentu at the “Saint Louis” Hospital, and Aristide Verneuil, head of the surgery department, at the Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital. (2)

Based on his innate gifts and innovative practice, on his detailed anatomical knowledge, rigorous hemostasis, consistent use of antisepsis and asepsis, Thoma Ionescu performed a functional surgery and made important contributions to general surgery, gynecology, urology, orthopedics, neurosurgery and ophthalmology, gastric, rectal and uterine oncologic surgery. In 1902, e.g., he published a pioneering paper on the “Surgical treatment of uterine cancer” (*Le traitement chirurgical du cancer utérin*), in which he proposed enlarged hysterectomy, a radical operation performed on the abdomen with complete lymph node discharge, able to remove cervical cancer. Another original approach in oncologic surgery was total gastrectomy in gastric cancers. He introduced ulcer gastrectomy twenty years before this method became common

practice, a therapy he presented at a Congress in Brussels in 1905. Ionescu set up new techniques for performing decompressive hemicraniectomies, nephropexy, splenectomy, resection of the maxillary nerve and Meckel ganglion, removal of ocular tumors etc. (2,3,5). Cervical sympathectomy, including sometimes the lower cervical ganglion, was another original procedure of his. In fact, Toma Ionescu practiced resection of the cervical sympathetic tract for treating exophthalmic goiter, epilepsy, glaucoma, *angina pectoris*. In 1916, cervico-thoracic sympathectomy for *angina pectoris* was performed together with Dr. Victor Gomoiu, his former student, who suggested the technique. Moreover, at the beginning it was agreed that the name of the procedure should be Ionescu-Gomoiu method. (Fig.3) An endless dispute arose thereafter between the two about the priority of the idea and its method. (6) Prof. René Leriche supported Gomoiu in this controversy.



Fig.3. a. Prof. Th. Ionescu, Dr. V. Gomoiu. [Therapeutical attempt. Cervico-thoracic sympathectomy in *angina pectoris*], Revista de Chirurgie, 1916, an III, no.5-6.

Apart from surgical procedures, Professor Ionescu improved several instruments such as the “Ionescu needle” - a metal-wire needle for total suture, or the “Ionescu retractor” - an autostatic abdominal retractor to which valves of different sizes could be attached. (2)

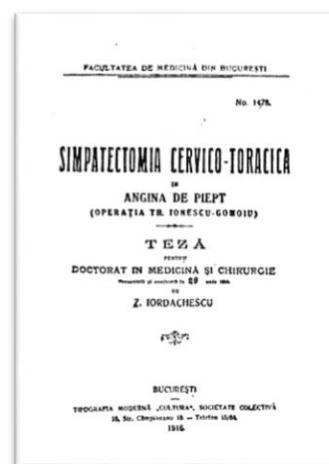


Fig. 3.b. Z. Iordachescu. Doctoral thesis on “The cervico-thoracic sympathectomy in *angor pectoris*” (Th. Ionescu-Gomoiu operation), Bucharest, 1916.

But his **general spinal anesthesia** rendered Ionescu famous all over the world, from Europe to North America. (7) His original technique of “General Rachianesthesia” (*La rachianesthésie générale*, Paris: Masson, 1919) recommended a mixture of stovaine and strychnine sulphate to be injected in the subarachnoid space of the cervical, thoracic or lumbar tract. (7, 8) Mainly the anesthetic solution was injected in the space between the spines of the second and third dorsal vertebrae, in order to avoid respiratory paralysis. It could equally be administered at lower levels, the solution being allowed to gravitate to the upper regions of the body, as the patient was in the Trendelenburg position. (9) Spinal analgesia permitted complex surgery to be performed while the patient remained conscious and continued breathing spontaneously. In Jonnesco’s time, inhalation general anesthesia still used toxic drugs and was practised in difficult conditions. However, Thomas Jonnesco’s subarachnoid anesthesia was often criticised and defined as a hazardous approach. In England, e.g., Professor Lawrie McGavin admitted that he

was not convinced of the safety of Jonnesco's method.(9) In 2011, on the occasion of the centenary of rachianesthesia, Professor Armando Fortuna concluded his review on Jonnesco's procedure by saying that "his results were neither convincing nor confirmed".(10) Quoting Carlos Parsloe's analysis of the "total spinal anesthesia" according to the description of Jonnesco himself, Fortuna found that even the book that Jonnesco published in 1919 (*La Rachianesthésie Générale*) "could not prevent the abandonment, within a very short time, of such a risky and low-safety procedure".(10)



Fig.4. Medal offered to Toma Ionescu by his pupils, friends and admirers. Ionescu performing rachistrychnostovainization -1908. (Obverse and reverse)

The efficient publicist and his complementary achievements. Professor Thoma Ionescu, who wrote many studies since a very young practitioner in Paris, understood perfectly well the necessity of scientific debates and knowledge dissemination. Consequently, as many other contemporaries, he established new medical periodicals. In 1896, together with Professors Victor Babes and Nicolae Kalinderu, he founded in Paris "Archives des Sciences Médicales" (*Archives of Medical Sciences*),

with international collaborators, and in Bucharest, the "Revista de Chirurgie" (*Journal of Surgery*) in 1897.

On February 11th, 1898, together with other famed specialists, he inaugurated in Bucharest the **Romanian Society of Surgery**, among the first of its kind created in the world.



Fig.5. Professor Thoma Ionescu and the Medal commemorating the Centenary of the Romanian Society of Surgery (1898-1998) he had created. (Obverse and reverse)

Value recognition. In recognition of his merits, Toma Ionescu was member of the Academy of Medicine in Paris, of the International Society of Surgery and an Honorary Member of the Romanian Academy. France awarded him the *Legion of Honor* Order. He gave conferences and performed demonstrations in several European countries and the United States of America and, if criticism often occurred, he always enjoyed high esteem, too.

Prof. Ionescu was the dean of the Faculty of Medicine of Bucharest from 1906 to 1912, 1921 to 1922 and 1925 to 1926. From 1912 to 1915 he was rector of the University of Bucharest. Four times he was elected to Parliament as deputy or senator. In 1924, seven of his fellows of the Bucharest

Faculty of Medicine nominated him to the Noble Prize for his contribution to anatomic discoveries.

In 1908, his disciples, friends and admirers offered him a medal celebrating his original method of spinal anesthesia using the stovaine-strychnine combination. (Fig.4) In 1989 the Centenary of the *Romanian Society of Surgery* was commemorated. On this latter occasion, a medal was minted, postcards and postage stamps were edited, conferences were organized and papers were published. (Fig.5-6)

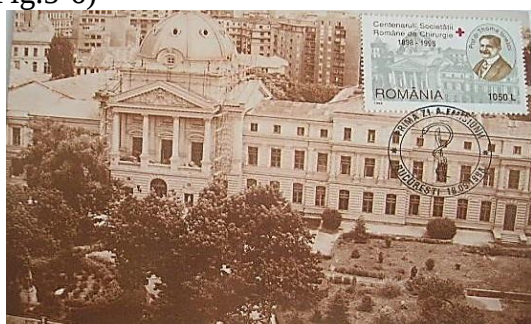


Fig. 6. Postcard representing the “Coltzea” Hospital and postal stamp issued in 1998, on the occasion of the Centenary of the Romanian Society of Surgery, founded by Professor Thoma Ionescu in 1898.

In Romania and abroad, 2010 was “The Thoma Ionescu Year”, celebrating 150 years since his birth and the centenary of his first public demonstrations of his “General Rachianesthesia” method in Europe and the United States. Numerous studies dealing with this topic and medals reminded these events. (Fig.7.a) In Romania, in Constantza, both Toma Ionescu and Victor Gomoiu were commemorated the same year during a joint Congress of the Romanian Societies for Surgery and for the History of Medicine. (Fig.7.b)

In 2011, on the occasion of the centenary of “Ionescu high spinal anesthesia”, retrospective analyses continued to be published all over the world. (10)



Fig. 7.a. Medal commemorating 150 years since Thoma Ionescu’s birth issued by the Romanian Academy

Thoma Ionescu’s connection with the Medical Faculty of Iasi. Owing to his colleagues and followers, Thoma Ionescu also influenced the surgical school of Iasi. Professor Paul Anghel, who supported the founding of the Romanian Society of Surgery, was one example.

Another one was Professor Ernest Juvara (1870-1933), who *had been appointed Associate Professor of Topographical Anatomy in Iasi, in 1899. After 1903, he equally taught Clinical Surgery until 1912 when he left for Bucharest.* Professor Juvara applied and taught to students the novel

“Ionescu rachi-strychno-stovainisation method” of anesthesia with preservation of the patient’s *conscious awareness*. On September 23rd, 1909, at the “St. Maria” Sanatorium of Iasi, he administered dorso-lumbar spinal anesthesia in the T12-L1 space to the doctoral student Alexandru Tzaicu (1883-1958) who decided to perform the first self-surgery for inguinal hernia, probably not only in his own country but in the world, too, as the project of his doctoral thesis. (11) (Fig.8.a-e)



Fig. 7 b. Medal celebrating 150 years since Thoma Ionescu’s birth and 50 years since Victor Gomoiu’s death – Romanian Societies for Surgery and for the History of Medicine Joint Congress Constantza, 2010 (obverse and reverse)

The first self-operation. The student-patient found a better tolerance than under chloroform anesthesia and noted that, in his case, pain required the initial dose to be supplemented. Tzaicu aimed at carrying out this operation using the original method of local anesthesia – the spinal strychno-stovainization – Professor Thoma Ionescu

had recently introduced to medical practice. (7, 8, 9)

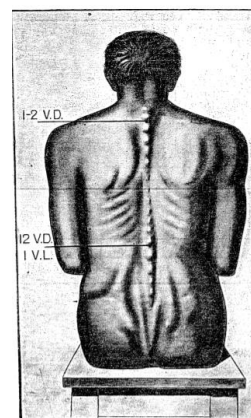


Fig.8.a. The two puncture places according to Prof. Ionescu’s latest technique: 1. high dorsal point (T1-T2); 2.dorso-lumbar point (T12-L1 vertebrae). (11)

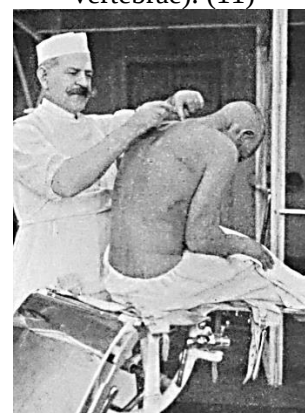


Fig.8. b. Professor Thoma Ionescu performing the high dorsal puncture. (11)

As Tzaicu mentioned in the foreword to his thesis, spinal anesthesia was by then the only procedure capable of replacing inhalation anesthesia with chloroform. (11)

While an intern in Professor Juvara’s Clinic, Tzaicu witnessed this practice and performed “Ionescu high spinal anesthesia” himself. Concurrently, Associate Professor Ion C. Balacescu (1870-1944), another representative of Thoma Ionescu’s school and Juvara’s coworker, practised this technique in the Second Surgical Clinic starting on November 17th 1908. Dr. Balacescu was appointed Associate Professor

(*Professeur agrégé*) at the Chair of Operatory Surgery of the Medical Faculty of Iasi in 1906. Several years later he returned to Bucharest where he came from, and where he continued to work closely both with Professor Thoma Ionescu and Professor Ernest Juvara, in the Institute of Topographical Anatomy. But Dr. Tzaicu thought that this type of spinal anesthesia would undoubtedly enable self-operations. More than this, he emphasized that physicians could thus much better understand their patients and what exactly happened to them under comparable conditions: "We should be prepared to experience ourselves what we recommend to others in similar circumstances" ... Besides, he estimated that, by practicing self-surgery, physicians would have a chance of submitting technical procedures and their consequences to "auto-observation", a much more valuable and ethical approach to medicine than "objective observation" from the outside alone, according to him. (11)



Fig.8.c. Rachianesthesia performed in Tzaicu's case, under Prof. Juvara's guidance. Doctors assisting Tzaicu: N. Apotheker and Șeptilici - Andrieș, along with Tzaicu's colleagues - Nubert brothers and Eugen Răuț. (11)

Published in 1910, as it was customary at the time, this thesis marked a milestone in the history of Romanian and universal medicine, being reviewed abroad and cited to

nowadays in various surveys on this topic. (12,13,14) (Fig.9) In 2002, e.g., Carlos Parsloe published *Three unusual reports with spinal anesthesia: McGavin, Pitkin and Tzaicou*, telling the reader that "Tzaicou, a 26-year-old Romanian surgeon, needed a herniorrhaphy" and decided to perform self-surgery under spinal anesthesia. (13)



Fig. 8.d.Tzaicu's selfoperation assisted by Prof. Juvara (11)

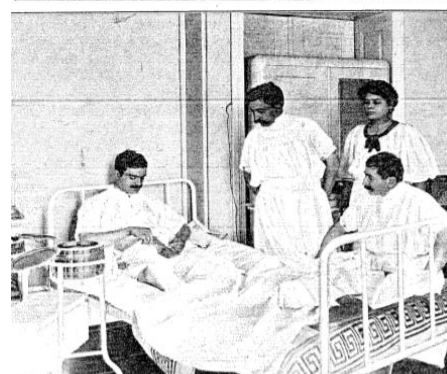
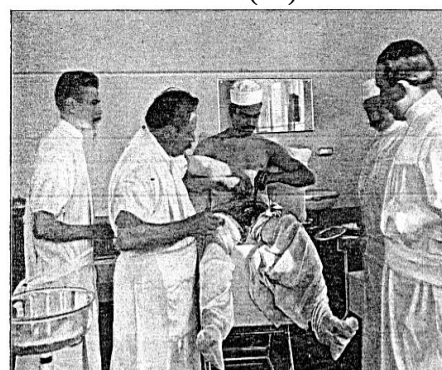


Fig. 8.e.Tzaicu's selfoperation assisted by Prof. Juvara; g. the student-patient removes himself the intradermal thread seven days after the operation (11)

Thoma Ionescu, the teacher, and the Romanian Universities. Prof. Dr. Thoma Ionescu, former deputy and senator in office in the Romanian Parliament, former dean and rector in office of the Bucharest University, addressed an interpellation to the Minister of the Cults and Public Instruction, Ion G. Duca, in the Meeting of the Senate on March 22nd, 1914. His intervention was entitled "Our universities".(15) (Fig.10) He spoke not only as a politician, but mostly as a citizen, a professor, a patriotic schoolman and scholarly teacher. He presented the difficulties "our universities" encountered fifty years after the foundation of the one in Bucharest (1864). As a matter of fact, he himself had the Romanian "University age": he was born the same year as the first modern University in Iasi - 1860.



Fig. 9. *Faculty of Medicine of Iasi. Alexandru Ţăicu. Self-observation of a groin self-operation under rachistrychnolstovainisation. Doctoral Thesis.1910. Title page.*

Brother to Take Ionescu, an outstanding liberal politician and prime minister of Romania, Toma was himself a scientist politically involved? Yet, as a critical witness of reality, he noticed and tried to mend the dysfunctionalities of the society he lived in.

A surprising reality. Th. Ionescu underlined four main roles that the Romanian University was called to play: (1.) training specialists in all fields of activity and providing a class of intellectuals capable of supporting the development and economic prosperity of the country; (2.) ensuring the hegemony of the country, which is conferred by the universities, due to the progress they enable for the entire society by promoting fundamental and applied sciences, knowledge, skills and efficient practice; (3) in addition, in Romania, where in 1914 there was no "definitively decided border", universities had also to help completing national unity, "achieving a soul connection between all those who feel Romanian, who have Romanian consciousness and sensitivity, here and all over the world"; (4) the hegemony by force, his country acquired during the Second Balkan War, should necessarily be accompanied by a cultural and thinking hegemony Romania should offer to the entire Balkan Peninsula. (15)

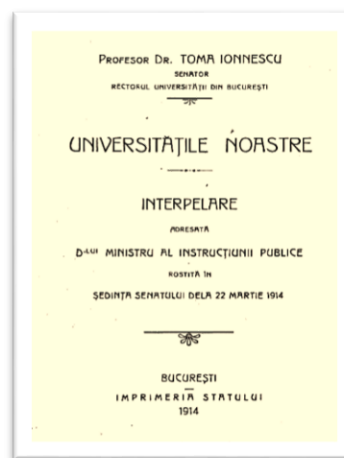


Fig. 10. Professor Toma Ionescu. [Our Universities], Bucharest, 1914. Cover.

That is why the lawyer Thoma Ionescu pleaded for better national universities with an improved level of instruction, comparable to the best similar institutions in Western Europe. Romania only had two universities

by then, that in Iasi (1860) and that in Bucharest (1864), but both had to become greater ones, and, considering their paramount importance, the State had to make sacrifices in order to help them rise to competitive competence levels.

Consequently, the rector of the Bucharest University supported the formation of professional and intellectual elites, of an aware social layer able to generate the adequate framework for national progress and emancipation, cultivating pure and applied science and scientific research, economic and financial consolidation of the modern Romanian state. For Professor Ionescu this was a must in the years that succeeded the Second Balkan War (1912-1913), when the First World War was already in the air. Creating a unitary national consciousness, the conviction of belonging to the same ethnic, cultural and spiritual identity, and of sharing similar ideals was a desideratum not to be postponed.

The terror of history - a repeating story. The proper fulfillment of the University purpose was hampered by factors that at the same time affected its "moral prestige": lack of real autonomy due to political influences and politically decided appointments; approval of politically established departments; reduced funds reflected in old deteriorated buildings and facilities, insufficient staff along with low wages. As a consequence, there was shortage of qualified personnel, hardly able to prepare the future high-level teachers; impossibility of material support for students, most of them, poor ones, even though excellent minds, forced to work up to exhaustion in order to sustain themselves; insufficient scholarships, dormitories and canteens.

The "fictional university"- diagnosis and treatment. Thoma Ionescu noted the exceptional results of many Romanian graduates and their appreciation in major

European universities, usually cited as reference points. The perfect patriot Thoma Ionescu, having studied law in Paris, argued convincingly for the correction of these "university fictions" and emphasized the need for the Romanian higher education to grow mature fast, now, fifty years after its inauguration in Bucharest in 1864.

Translational medicine from bench, from tube to bedside. "The state must understand its interest and seek remedy to this harmful condition that affects even its own interests" - claimed Professor Ionescu, who explained: "Gentlemen, what we really need are those laboratories, those application schools associated to our faculties so that they become from simple schools where pure science is taught, useful institutions, by creating specialties in the various branches of our social and economic activity." besides bedside teaching of medicine. "Today medicine is no longer learned by words and from the book; it is learned next to the patient and in the laboratory. There is no longer a clinician who only place the ear on the patient's body; today, the real clinician is the one who has the laboratory next to him." Obviously, Ionescu clearly distinguished between theoretical and practical medicine, between clinical medicine and medical research, a challenge that continues to be debated upon nowadays.

"Currently there are clinics that exist only on paper". An aspect of the academic puzzle Toma Ionescu criticized and named "fictional university" were the inexistent specialty clinics and chairs, although professionals and medical practice existed and were required. "Only I, as a dean - he said -, sent so many papers to the minister, that he could have filled an entire house with the addresses I gave them requesting the accomplishment of this rhinology service. But to tell you the truth, Dr. Felix is very modest. If he were a politician who sought to

influence everywhere, to make jokes on the right and on the left, perhaps he would have obtained his clinic. But he did not want to; his dignity resisted and that is why he remained with the clinic on paper.”^Dr. Felix mentioned in this interpellation was the son of Dr. Iacob Felix, the celebrated hygienist. Dr. Eugeniu Felix (1874-1917), was a reputed professor of otorhinolaryngology (1913-1917) at the University of Bucharest, who unfortunately died a few years later, in 1917, in Iasi, during World War I (Fig.11).



Fig.11. Prof. Eugeniu Felix

Much better known not only in his native country but all over the world, as well, Dr. Marinescu was another example (Fig. 12). This great neurologist was “forced - so to say «to bring on his back» - (..) to the city center the few patients with whom he has to do the clinic with his students.” ... “in fact – concluded Ionescu - there is no clinic for Dr. Marinescu”. The rector went on underlying: “If we who have a clinic in downtown, possess a fictitious clinic, because we do not have laboratories, you can imagine what poor Dr. Marinescu has to cope with” ...

How does this unhappy university professor get something for improvement and for the requirements of education?

He has to climb the stairs of the ministry tens of thousands of times to get a friendly favor. If he couldn't get anything from the ministry, he has to go and look for it at the budget commission - maybe he finds a

friend, and then asks him: [Do it] For me! And it's not really for him, it's for his lab. He has to beg for his lab or seminar, and there are colleagues of mine who do not want to resort to this means, and they never ask for it, but they never get anything either.” So, as Ionescu put it: “we have hospitals, yet we do not have clinics”.



Fig. 12. Prof. Gheorghe Marinescu in his laboratory

Self-financing large, real universities.

“Those universities [i.e., from abroad] – noticed Professor Ionescu - knew how to come to live by themselves; let us make it possible our universities to get there too.” And he added: “Today there is no more theoretical science, but only applied science; i.e., it is able to bestow real strength on higher education. Laboratories, seminars, clinics, that's where the student really absorbs knowledge, from there he grows useful and not useless for the social class in which he will be thrown...” The funds granted by the Government alone were reduced and this explained the precarious buildings and endowments; the small salaries, hence the lack of a qualified staff, able to train the future “teachers”. Concurrently, the lack of money caused the impossibility of financially supporting the deserving students, who were paupers most of them, while the “wealthy students go abroad, across the border”.

“The prestige of a country is its universities”. “Did it [i.e., the university]

produce anything in these fifty years of existence? The answer, Gentlemen, is that yes, although I saw today in a diary an article by a colleague [Simion Mehedinti] who tells us: If the magistrates are as they are, the university professor is to blame. If the lawyers are as they are, the examples they have at their university are guilty. If the teachers are as they are, we, their teachers at their university, are to be blamed. If the doctors are as they are, ask the Faculty of Medicine.”

“The inherent qualities of our nation”.

“The inherent qualities of our nation, the individual and collective qualities of our nation were so great that in spite of all these difficulties, however, there were and still are people who honor not only Romanian science, but world science, as well.” That is why ... “Doctors are above what it was expected fifty years ago that Romanian doctors could have ever been in their Romanian country.”

“The past is the guarantee of the future”. “If in this field - [medical staff training] - our universities were useful, the second purpose, that of performing science for science, would have been fulfilled more than the means at our disposal allowed” and, in fact: “All you have to do is research I don't like to give proper names here, but look for yourselves in foreign academic societies and you will see many Romanians among their members; search through didactic textbooks or monographs and you will see quotes of them in every paragraph, on every page.”

Indeed, by then, as things happen nowadays, too, Romanian scholars proved to be hard workers, innovative brains and were often invited to collaborate with outstanding international scientists and remarkable institutions.

“Our Universities”. For the eminent surgeon and university professor, former

dean and current rector of the academic establishment in Bucharest it was a *sense of duty to save it from the disaster of mediocrity, and, as Kant had pointed out, “Conscience is the bond between duty and obligation”*.

Only in this way, could Prof. Toma Ionescu be in peace with his own moral and professional principles. “For almost twenty years – he emphasized - I have returned to the country, for twenty years I have given my work every day in the service of the medical faculty and the university I love.

My speech today had no other purpose than to make vibrate in your souls the same desire, which we all have, to raise this university as high as possible, by your goodwill here, and by everyone's consent.”

“That is why everything I (...) say in this interpellation, (...) even (...) some unpleasant things (...) are not started from a political intention, but are started (...) from the zeal that I have to serve the interests of the university.”

Between two wars. Between the Second Balkan War and the Great War, the world and particularly young modern states such as Romania had to face major and complex crises. Answering to Thoma Ionescu's interpellation, the minister I. G. Duca highlighted the difficulties all interdependent branches of the Romanian education system were confronted to. Primary, secondary, as well as professional and commercial schools were all basic components of it and faced huge problems. Or, pre-university education was the root and the stem that ensured the brilliance of the academic crown. “Let's keep ourselves among civilized states” at least, he retorted. “Dr. T. Ionescu spoke to us in vain about the beautiful role of the university, about the hegemony that they are called to exercise over the entire Romanianism, because I would ask him to tell me, if he thinks that, with such a large number of illiterates, we can not only think of

hegemony, but at least maintain our place among civilized states” - I. G. Duca concluded. In fact, educational issues Romania had to deal with were more intricate, and, for a solid academic life, a withered root and a frail stem would never support the shiny crown of the tree of knowledge, the interpellation envisaged.

«**Making a clean job**» gave hope. Getting the job done, the rector expressed his hope that things could still be corrected. He equally proved to be affectively connected to both his university and his students. “I would not have said all that – Thoma Ionescu specified – if the evil had been irreversible. My feeling as a Romanian - because this part predominates in my soul - would have prevented me from saying these things, if repair was not possible.” “The students of our faculties come to study in our universities (..) motivated by a spiritual need” and not primarily for money. (..) “Well, I think that these zealous young people deserve all our support and we are obliged to help them. They are the future of our country and, as such, I consider that we are obliged to do everything we can so that when they come on these benches, they may have the strength and energy necessary to be really useful elements for the defense of the country and of the nation.”

Toma Ionescu, a fighter for national unity. During the “neutrality years” (1914-1916), that preceded and prepared Romania’s entry into the First World War (WWI), Toma Ionescu got actively involved in defending the “national cause”. In 1914, as rector of the University, he participated in the meetings of the academic staff aimed at drafting a motion in support of the Transylvanian Romanians, that even recommended the Romanian Army’s penetration in Transylvania, that was already dragged into the war, from the very beginning of the conflagration. On September 14th, 1914, the rector, Prof.

Ionescu, presided over another meeting of outstanding members of the teaching staff, when, in the end, France was given ovations, whereas Austria and Germany were booed.

On September 23rd, 1914, the prime-minister Ion I.C. Bratianu, a “bourgeois tyrant” – according to Professor Cantacuzino – received with coldness and relative indifference the academics’ delegation, including Toma Ionescu, Constantin Dissescu, and Ion Cantacuzino (16).

At the beginning of November, King Ferdinand granted an audience, too. This time, the delegation was composed of Professors Constantin I. Istrati, Ermil Pangrati, Ioan Tanoviceanu and Ion Cantacuzino. They handed over the motion and shortly presented its content. The King was more favorable to their initiative, because even though undertaken by representatives of the University, it was an educational attitude, as well. The same day, a gathering was held at Cantacuzino’s home, and the creation of the “National Action” Committee was decided.

WWI started in a concrete manner for Romania only in August 1916. Prof. Ionescu was active in the hospitals of Iasi and other cities in Moldavia, taking care of the wounded and the diseased. He also wrote for the medical periodicals edited in 1917-1919 that focused on war medicine: “Comptes-Rendus de la Société Médico-Chirurgicale du Front Russo-Roumain” (Iasi, 1917), “Comptes-Rendus des Séances de la Réunion Médicale de la II-ème Armée” (Bacau, 1917-1918); “Revista Chirurgicala Romana” (*The Romanian Surgical Journal*) (1918-1919). On February 28th, 1917, e.g., he gave a lecture on “General Anesthesia” at the “Medico-Surgical Society of the Russian-Romanian Front” and published articles in its bimonthly “Comptes-Rendus...” (“Reports...”). (16)

In 1918 he participated in the National Council of Romanian Unity in Paris, a society his brother, Take Ionescu, presided over and a year later he published "La Question Roumaine" (Paris: Payot et Cie, 1919) (*The Romanian Problem*), a book in two volumes, where he explained and defended the Romanian cause in front of the great influential nations, called to decide the fate of smaller European peoples when WWI finished. That is why Thoma Ionescu, along with Nicolae Titulescu and Dimitrie Negulescu, was among the first three delegates Romania appointed to the League of Nations (*Société des Nations*), on August 27th, 1920.

Professor Ionescu died at only 65 years of age, on March 28th, 1926, few days before the VIIth Congress of the International Society of Surgery - the creation of which in Brussels in 1902 he also supported - officially opened in Rome on April 7th, and in which he planned to participate.

Conclusions. Thoma Ionescu, the highly proficient surgeon, drew a realistic and dramatic picture of the Romanian society and accurately dissected its university education system at the dawn of the XXth century. Several constants are identifiable until present day: on the one hand, Romanians' sharpness of mind, creativity and individual skills, on the other hand, everlasting social, economic and political impediments. It is quite sad to note that current issues encountered in today's Romania and still confronting the national education system, particularly moral ones, are sometimes comparable to those already approached and clearly diagnosed and discussed by Professor Ionescu more than one century ago. Sometimes, political influences, corruption, a relative scarcity of money and lack of motivation render contemporary challenges as difficult to overcome as they used to be in Ionescu's

day. Hopefully "error and trial" methods would eventually yield their spiritual fruit that people are longing for. "Our universities", Faculties of Medicine included, have to remain the real pride of this country, to further cultivate their professional quality and social dimension, such as Professor Toma Ionescu dreamt of and advised us to do. Undoubtedly this is also a problem of national security, as the great surgeon thoroughly proved and supported by his complex activity during his entire life.

Conflict of Interest

Author has no conflict of interest to disclose.

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